

**Honorable City Planning Commission
Cincinnati, Ohio**

January 6, 2006

SUBJECT: A report and recommendation on a proposed amendment to the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan in Evanston.

BACKGROUND

In April of 1998, City Planning Commission and City Council adopted the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan. Since the Plan's adoption, developer Neyer Properties, Inc. has formulated a strategy to redevelop the property at the southeast portion of the Urban Renewal area, near the intersection of Dana Avenue and Realistic Avenue. This proposed redevelopment, *The Keystone*, would be comprised of approximately 446,000 square feet of Class A office space on top of a three story parking structure, with an out-parcel for a restaurant or other amenity. Neyer Properties, Inc. is also working with the Evanston Community Council, Cincinnati Recreation Commission and Cincinnati Park Board to discuss coordination of needed improvements to the adjacent Evanston Playfield.

According to Section 725-19 of the Cincinnati Municipal Code: "the City Manager or any person interested may petition Council to modify an urban renewal plan. Such petition shall be in writing and shall state in detail the modification desired. Upon receipt of such petition, Council shall refer it to the City Planning Commission for its recommendation. The City Planning Commission shall either approve or disapprove the modification and return the petition to Council, together with its recommendation."

On October 12, 2005, City Councilmember Cranley requested that the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan be amended to incorporate the proposed *Keystone* development.

PURPOSE OF THE AMENDMENT

The proposed development overlaps the 1998 Urban Renewal boundary, with a large portion of the proposed development on adjacent land in a small residential area immediately to the south and east of the boundary. This amendment would add the portion of the development that is not already within the Urban Renewal boundary. This results in an addition of about 21 acres of land to the Urban Renewal Plan including the site of the proposed development and the Evanston Playfield. The amendment also incorporates a description of the concept of *The Keystone* development.

ANALYSIS

An Urban Renewal Plan is the City's official guide for future development within the Urban Renewal boundary, and it is a requirement that the City's administration and the elected and appointed bodies follow the recommendations set forth therein. It is also reasonable to expect that conditions may change and unexpected opportunities may arise following the adoption of these Plans. In situations where this is the case, it is wholly appropriate to amend the Plan to support these changes and opportunities.

Consistency with 1998 Urban Renewal Plan

The Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan places strong emphasis on revitalizing the NBD with new development of businesses that can serve the Evanston community as well as provide jobs to residents. The development of office uses and the available restaurant out-parcel may provide some jobs and needed services to area residents. However, the greatest opportunity this proposed development provides is the new influx of over 2,000 employees to the area each day in need of restaurants and other nearby services. This will provide a new customer base for existing businesses and may spur new businesses.

Coordination with Cincinnati Recreation Commission and Cincinnati Park Board

The proposed development is adjacent to the Evanston Playfield, which is owned by Cincinnati Park Board and operated by Cincinnati Recreation Commission (CRC). Because *The Keystone* presents an excellent opportunity to coordinate improvements to the playfield, Neyer Properties, Inc. has met on several occasions (November 9, December 8, and December 19, 2005) with staff from CRC and the Park Board. The meetings also included representatives from the Evanston Community Council, the City Manager's Office of Economic Development, and the Department of Community Development and Planning. Proposed improvements discussed include: reconfiguration of both passive and active

recreation space, restoration of the swimming pool, renovation of the historic pool house, and the addition of a walking trail, a 1,000 Hands Playground, and new adjacent parking. Neyer Properties, Inc., CRC, and the Park Board have pledged to continue to work together and with the Evanston Community to finalize and implement plans for park improvements.

Eminent Domain

The City of Cincinnati is often reluctant to include residential property in an Urban Renewal area. This is because eminent domain is an option in an Urban Renewal area, and the City does not like to suggest that it is willing to displace residents for commercial redevelopment unnecessarily or without serious consideration. This situation is not as challenging because Neyer Properties, Inc. has purchased or has an option on nearly all parcels needed for the development, eliminating the need for use of eminent domain.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Representatives of Neyer Properties, Inc. have met with Evanston Community Council leadership on several occasions to discuss this potential project. The full Evanston Community Council heard a presentation on this development and voted to support the amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan on October 20, 2005. One of the reasons the Evanston Community Council felt comfortable approving this amendment after only one meeting was the assurance that all property was being acquired privately, and that eminent domain would not be necessary. Additionally, the Community Council hoped that Neyer Properties, Inc. would continue to keep them informed of the status of this project. In all, the Community Council felt that this development would be beneficial to the Evanston neighborhood.

In the 1998 Plan, zoning recommendations called for a change from manufacturing zoning to commercial zoning on the eastern-most portion of Dana Avenue in order to make the area more attractive for development. This rezoning did occur, but future rezoning will be necessary for this project to develop on residential land. Nearby property owners and the Evanston Community Council will again have the opportunity to comment on this development as it progresses through the zone change process.

FINDINGS

Staff recommends amending the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan to include the sites of the proposed *Keystone* development and the Evanston playfield. The Department of Transportation and Engineering's Office of Architecture and Urban Design completed a Blight Study of the property proposed to be added to the Urban Renewal Boundary. The summary of the Blight Study will be included in the amended document, along with a summary of the proposed project, a proposed site plan, and proposed renderings of the anticipated development.

CONCLUSIONS

1. An amendment to the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan is appropriate, as the circumstances of the site have changed to include a new neighborhood-supported development.
2. The amendment should include the blight study for the expanded Urban Renewal area, as well as the concept for the proposed *Keystone* development.

RECOMMENDATION

The staff of the Department of Community Development and Planning recommends that City Planning Commission take the following action:

Approve the amendments to the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan in Evanston as attached.

APPROVED:

Respectfully submitted,

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Chief Planner

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Senior City Planner

Attachments

Proposed Amendment to the Evanston NBD Urban Renewal Plan

City Planning Commission
January 6, 2006



0 300 600 Feet

- Existing UR Area
- Proposed Addition to UR Area
- Buildings

1998 Urban Renewal Boundary

Proposed Addition to
Urban Renewal Area

